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Regional Seminar on Mine Action in the Americas

"En Camino Hacia un Hemisferio Libre de Minas Antipersonal"
Lima, Peru August 14–15, 2003

Executive Summary

The third annual regional landmine action seminar entitled “En Camino Hacia un Hemisferio Libre de Minas Antipersonal,” hosted by the Government of Perú and sponsored by the Government of Canada and the Mine Action Program (AICMA, for its initials in Spanish) of the Organization of American States (OAS), was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Lima, Perú, on August 14–15 2003. The two-day gathering brought together over 100 mine action experts from 24 countries and more than a dozen regional and international organizations to discuss a wealth of mine action topics including, among others, the definition of national and regional priorities, mine clearance, mine risk education, victim assistance, and stockpile destruction. These topics allowed for a holistic discussion on mine action within the region and provided a forum for representatives of countries throughout the Americas to address issues concerning every facet of mine action, as well as the challenges they face in their countries. Most importantly, participants shared with regional counterparts their plans and projections through 2004. This was also the first of two opportunities to assist Ottawa Convention State Parties of the Americas to prepare for the 2004 Review Conference.

The objective of the seminar was to explore, in detail, the impact of collective efforts to rid the hemisphere of the threat of mines and to assist Ottawa Convention State Parties in preparing for the Review Conference set to be held in Nairobi, Kenya at the end of November 2004. The seminar also served as a forum where participating countries were able to set both regional and national implementation targets and discuss cooperative means to reach these targets. It also served to reinforce the OAS’s existing mine action mechanisms—particularly the OAS/General Assembly mine action resolutions—by ensuring that a strong link is made between the work of the AICMA Team and the commitments that OAS Member States, Regional State Parties to the Ottawa Convention have accepted in implementing both the OAS Resolutions related to landmines and to implementing the Ottawa Convention.

The first day of the seminar was composed of three panels, which included a number of presentations offered by representatives of national demining projects, international organizations, and governmental organizations. The first panel focused on identifying and defining national priorities and included a presentation on the general status and operations of the Ottawa Convention, offered by Ambassador Jean Lint, President of the Fourth Meeting of State Parties; a presentation on the general condition and operation of Mine Action programs throughout the Americas, offered by Colonel (r) William McDonough, Coordinator of the AICMA-OAS; and presentations by representatives of mine action programs in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Perú, Suriname, and Venezuela. The second panel focused on identifying and defining regional priorities and included a presentation on the

identification of methods to refocus/strengthen the role of the OAS in Mine Action, offered by Minister Counselor Amando Arriazola Peto Rueda of the Mexican Embassy in Peru, and a presentation on mobilizing political commitment, South/South cooperation, and goals for 2004, offered by Col. McDonough. The final panel concerned Resource Mobilization and included presentations on the experiences of the United States in Private/Public Partnership building, offered by Ms. Donna Hopkins, Multilateral Programs Officer for the United States Department of State; a presentation on mainstreaming mine action into national development initiatives, offered by Mr. Andrew Shore, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Canada; and a presentation on the importance of a national spokesperson and the engaging of national authorities, offered by Mrs. Maria Auxiliadora Cuadra, Vice Minister of Defense and Executive Secretary of the National Demining Commission of Nicaragua. Following the panels, international organizations including the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), the International Campaign to Ban Landmine, James Madison University, the Pan American Health Organization, and the International Committee of the Red Cross made presentations on their mine action efforts in the region and provided participants with a forecast of their activities and services to be offered to the region through 2004.

The second day consisted of four working groups, two taking place simultaneously in the morning and two taking place simultaneously in the afternoon, with the Co-Chairmen of the working groups presenting a summary of results to seminar participants. The first set of working groups studied and discussed topics related to the “Clearing of Mined Land and Mine Risk Education” and “Victim Assistance.” The working group on mine clearance and mine risk education, Co-Chaired by the OAS and Honduras, included a presentation by Colonel (r) Carl Case, Senior Specialist of AICMA-OAS, on the experiences and lessons learned of the more mature mine action programs of the OAS in Central America and how these can translate to the more recent programs in South America, as well as the roles of the military and international monitors. Additionally, Dr. Juan Umaña Loaisiga, Technical Secretary of Nicaragua’s National Demining Commission, offered a presentation on the integration of mine risk education into mine clearance activities and lessons learned.

The second working group of the morning session concentrated on topics relevant to “Victim Assistance,” Co-Chaired by Colombia and Chile, included a presentation on the general status of victim assistance in the Americas, offered by Mr. Richard Villadiego, Representative of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and Member of the CIREC Colombia, and a Nicaraguan case study presented by Mr. Carlos Orozco, National Coordinator of the AICMA-OAS in Nicaragua, which highlighted the victim assistance program of Nicaragua from the moment of an accident to the social reintegration of the victim. Additionally, Mr. Orozco demonstrated how national mine action commissions, regional organizations, and civil society can work hand-in-hand.

The second set of working groups focused on topics related to the “Destruction of Stockpiled Mines” and “Information Exchange.” The working group on stockpile destruction, Co-Chaired by Guatemala and Ecuador, included a presentation by

Lieutenant Colonel (r) John MacBride, Advisor to the Canadian Mine Action Team, on the identification of needs for outside assistance on the part of countries that are in the process of destroying their stockpiles as well as on regional cooperation, South/South cooperation, and the reduction of the quantity of mines retained for training as a regional confidence and security building measure.

The working group on “Information Exchange,” Co-Chaired by Argentina and Trinidad and Tobago, included a presentation on the sharing of best practices for the provision of information in annual reports required under Article 7 and the Convention/OAS transparency reports, offered by Mr. Kerry Brinkert, Manager of the Implementation Support Unit of the GICHD, as well as a presentation on information management, data collection, and the obligations under Article 9, National Legislation, offered by Colonel (r) Guillermo Leal, National Coordinator of the AICMA-Ecuador, and Mr. Jaime Toso, National Coordinator of the AICMA-Peru.

A number of suggestions and conclusions were drawn from the panels and working groups. Concerning stockpile destruction, it was considered important, as a confidence and security-building measure, to reduce the quantities of mines retained and to suggest that a new section be added to the Article 7 reports so that States clearly indicate the purpose for which they are being used.; It was also recommended that, to foster Article 6 cooperation on stockpile destruction, a database of technical experts from the region be created that could, with donor support, to assist other regions As countries throughout the region complete the destruction of their stockpiles, it was deemed important to share the lessons learned with others that are embarking on the destruction of their own stockpiled mines, these lesson learned could be presented in Kenya.

Concerning the topic of Mine Clearance, the need was acknowledged for the creation of a lessons learned document to be shared in 2004 during the Review Conference and shared with other regions of the world including lessons learned on, among others, command and control, bilateral/multilateral negotiations (joint cooperation in border areas), civil/military cooperation, technology, and methodology. It was also recommend that the region along with international partners develop post-clearance guidelines.

Concerning victim assistance, it was deemed important that each mine-affected country arrive in 2004 with an integral and comprehensive victim assistance national plan; that the region create a mechanisms to exchange information, experiences and technical and human resource expertise in this area; States were also urged to involve both public and private health institution at all stages of care, whenever considered appropriate. Concerning information exchange and management, the goal was established for full ratification of Signatory Countries as well as 100% reporting rates and the initiation and completion of all Article 9 reports. In order to assist this process information management and field reports should be standardized with training provided on field reporting information management.

Finally, concerning the issue of resource mobilization, it was deemed important to integrate mine action, where appropriate, to national development plans and identifying mine action as a priority in all international forums, not solely to the mine action

community. It was also recommended to raise public awareness by engaging the private sector and senior political personalities to spearhead the cause.

Concerning regional planning for 2004, it was agreed that mine action should play a prominent role on the agendas of the Special Conference on Hemispheric Security to be held in Mexico in the fall of 2003. The OAS should also provide support for the more political obligations of the Convention such as Article 7 and should continue working closely with the Hemispheric Security Committee. Additionally, the presentations by various organizations during the seminar reminded the participants of the support that can be garnered from other groups. At the national level, ambitious priorities were identified and set by individual mine-affected States, the most prominent one being that of achieving the goal of a mine free hemisphere within the timeline prescribed by the Ottawa Convention. Guatemala announced that it should complete all of its mine clearance activities in 2004 and Honduras hoped to do the same in 2003-2004. Mine clearance operations should begin in Chile in 2004 and both Peru and Ecuador have forecasted the end of their mine clearance work for 2009–2010. Peru went on to say that it hoped to have all minefields found within the interior of the country cleared by 2004. Seminar participants agreed that the seminar was a great success in allowing them to maintain contacts with mine action experts throughout the region. The next regional landmine seminar is scheduled for June 2004, with the Government of Ecuador having agreed to host the event in Quito.